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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

An address delivered before the Lincoln Memorial Meeting of the Muldraugh District Medical Association, held at the Lincoln Farm, near Hodgenville, LaRue County, Ky., on the 7th day of September, 1916

BY

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Abraham Lincoln

“Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?

Like a swift, fleeting meteor, a fast flying cloud,

A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
Man passes from life to his rest in the grave.”

Standing upon this ground made immortal by the birth of Abraham Lincoln, beside the lowly log hut in which the humblest, simplest, and plainest of our National Leaders was born, within the walls of an edifice erected by the free gifts of a generous and liberty loving people, we meet, my medical brethren and fellow citizens, that we may pay tribute to, and take courage and inspiration from one of the greatest men America produced. His memory lives in deeds, not of valor, not of slaughter, not of blood reeking fields and vanquished foes, but homely ones, deeds that lightened misery, made the sad joyous, restored lost sons to weeping mothers and doomed husbands to heart-broken wives—a man whose traits, simple and human endeared him to us and makes his memory a blessed and a hallowed one. To-day in his case, we reverse the

Shakespearean dictum that the "Good is oft interred with their bones."

We Kentuckians may take a just pride and a pleasure in knowing that there has been created a Nation's Shrine, permanently set aside by the people, under the control of the Federal Government, to which in future years, pilgrims the world over, will come and hold communion with an unforgettable memory. One hundred and seven years ago, on February 12th, 1809, on the big South Fork of the



Lincoln Memorial

Nolin River, a plain and simple couple, living in the then backwoods of Kentucky, and now the County of LaRue, had born unto them a male child who was destined to sway the hearts and lives of his countrymen and to hold in the hollow of his bony palms the destinies of millions of souls. Here upon this little sterile farm was born a human light.

whose very shape and build and look were like the environmental aspects that surrounded him. Here on this sod he was to lay in his early life the foundation for that rugged strength and power of endurance that he strained in the dark hours of Chancellorville and that ever marked the career of this wonderful and unusual man. We speak a great deal of heredity and environment. While his parents came of ordinary good stock, still his father was coarse and illiterate, his mother probably tubercular, and his environment so barren physically and intellectually, that we wonder as to whether or not the indomitable persistence, the perseverance and success that this man attained was in spite of heredity and environment. He had no chance in life, coming as he did, from the commonest clay and no opportunity for betterment save what he himself made, and it is this, and his upward struggle that has made this lowly, clumsy backwoodsman, the model and the inspiration for the struggling youth of our Nation. In Kentucky, later in Indiana and Illinois, he grew and developed, making his character "even as you and I." From inhospitable opportunity and lack of chance, he turned the tables of adversity and from his poverty and dire needs he struggled upward, doing unselfishly for others, learning to love humanity in the abstract, broad, deep, lasting. From his own struggles and deprivations he learned how others struggled and suffered and therefore felt a deep and personal sympathy for

them; from his contact with the people he learned what books can never teach, an experience and knowledge of men. From wood and vale, from land and sky, from the terrible battle to extract a living from a barren land,



Statue of Lincoln, Hodgenville

from solitude and the simple life, he was learning that courage, that humor and that truth that was to stand him in good stead when the dark days came—when hurled into

the chaos of an internecine strife he saw brother smite brother, saw a great Nation rent asunder, saw the white stripes of courage, the red bars of blood and the stars of liberty and freedom threatened with destruction and partial eclipse. From his life's record we medical men, especially those that practice in the country can take unto ourselves the lesson here recorded, meeting the inhospitable elements, the difficulties of the work, the lack of sympathy, the failure to remunerate, may yet pluck the precious jewel from sweet adversity and purifying the soul through endless effort, develop to its utmost a kindly helpfulness, a resourcefulness, sympathy, courage, and humor, like unto this man, whom we honor to-day and whom all the world loves. Let it not be said that we cannot and will not profit by a knowledge of the early struggles of Lincoln, but let us each in his sphere carry in his heart and breast his undaunted courage, and from trial and tribulation uplift ourselves to a seat among the pure in heart.

Lincoln grew to young manhood passing through many phases of life; farmer, frontiersman, merchant and politician, finally reaching the goal he had so longed for namely, the practice of law. At that time the fully matured man had developed a body, a personality and a character that made him unique in every way. He stood like a tall sycamore six feet four inches; long of arm, lank of leg, with great big bony hands and feet; with a skin dry and yellow; a face thin

and gawky; cheek bones high and prominent; angular at every turn, awkward and gawky, yet possessing tremendous strength from muscles like flexible steel wires. He was stooped shouldered with a tendency to walk with his scraggy neck thrust forward and his mouth awry. In their sockets were put a pair of strong eyes, sunken, grey and melancholic, partly hidden by their cavernous orbits.



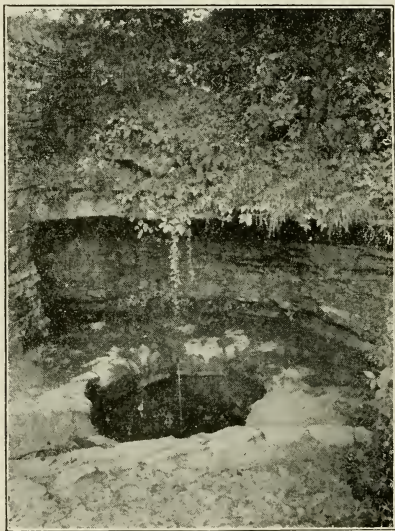
Lincoln Cabin.

As though God had attempted a contrast, He made this uncouth, ugly man honest, good natured, courageous, gentle, generous, fair, kind, chivalrous, self-reliant, sincere, cool calm, and slow to anger; blessed him with a quaint and charming humor; made him eloquent of speech, a splendid storyteller; sensitive, imaginative, tender as a woman; yet self-willed, determined, original, with unconven-

tional manners. This country clod-hopper, woodchopper, peddler, pioneer, abolitionist, politician, and lawyer rose from his lowly estate to be the proud possessor of the highest gift within the power of the American people whom he loved in *fact* and not in *fiction* of the political speech makers. To me, it would seem that Lincoln's features would have been cold and chill, were it not for the fact that they were plastic, that over them could play that redeeming smile that welled from the deep chambers of a heart so warm, so generous, so large and so loving that all humanity seemed to find an abiding place and yet leave within its chambers vast veldts yet untouched. To me of all his traits his very humanity with its frailties, and weaknesses, makes him more a man and less a God and brings him and his memory into such close touch with us. Heroes we all admire, are willing to accord to them that wonderful power, that transcendent ability and that mystery that sets them apart, but some way, or some how the possession and the exhibition of simple, plain, everyday frailties such as we possess, brings us in close harmony with him who could at one and the same time be of the earth, earthly and yet whose soul was attuned with the Infinite.

Lincoln possessed an almost uncanny faculty of presenting facts, simply and clearly. A clear presentation of facts requires a clear conception of facts, and perhaps this faculty

was brought out and cultivated in the lonely solitudes of a lonely and unhappy youth, brought compactly together and shaped definitely by the hard knocks of experience even as the blacksmith compacts and shapes the molten mass under the powerful blows of his



Spring on Lincoln Farm

heavy sledge. Lincoln did his own thinking. This may seem trite and commonplace, but it is really surprising how few do their own thinking. The "herd" tendency and the rule of the "system" lead most men to learn

secretly what the majority think, keep their ear to the ground for every change and after adopting the views of the multitude to blatantly express them as their own. Lincoln would never have been ruled by a system. Having become sure of his ground he would maintain it although always liberal and tolerant of the opinions of others. No man ever lived that respected more one's motives and he was the last to attribute sordidity and meanness to others, but really endeavored himself to find the truth.

Would that all men, and especially doctors were less hasty to condemn their brother doctor, without facts, without knowledge and without that reasonable investigation that the truth seeker should ever possess before he indulges in the luxury of an expressed opinion. It is said that "the truth is mighty and will prevail," but its success and establishment may be long delayed, especially where any system or oligarchy endeavors to make all men equal, to suppress personal endeavor and discovery, and to rob men of the fruits of their labor and endeavor, under the specious pretense of good for humanity. Science in general and medical science in particular is at its best when freed from the trammeling influence of such repression, for it must ever be remembered that genius knows neither locality, creed, Nation, nor body of men, but springs like Minerva, full armed *cap-a-pie* without the walls of Academic University, in unlikely places and should be uplifted, not

repressed. Few can weather the cruel grill, make good and achieve a great end as Lincoln did, but between the extremes lie many lesser geniuses and lights that an oligarchy would destroy, letting their gems of purest ray serene decorate some dark unfathomed cave, dooming them to mediocrity. We must bear in mind and practice in our own ranks the liberality and the breadth that characterized this great American.

Lincoln is a shining mark to a man educating himself. If I were asked to give a reason why he learned so much I would promptly answer that he wasted no opportunity to acquire knowledge. His historians tell us that he loved not the laborious and rocky road to learning, nor had he the knack of ready acquirement, but what he did beget was the result of much travail, hard study and slow acquirement. He himself has likened his mind to a tablet of steel, upon which it was hard to engrave a single line, but once cut, it was almost impossible to ever erase it, and what he accomplished was in spite of the fact that he hated mental drudgery. I have personally learned from the hardest of knocks what Lincoln early learned, that there is no *via regia* to knowledge, and that everything that is well done requires time and careful preparation, and that the finding of the real facts in any field of effort only comes after hard study, cold analysis and thorough separation of the wheat from the chaff. Would

that the medical profession in this respect, more often followed Lincoln's example.

The fool, the knave, and the charlatan profess to know even to all knowledge. It is the wise man who says "I do not know." It was neither humility nor hypocrisy that led Lincoln to refrain from many claims to knowledge he did not possess, but in this as in all things he had an honesty of purpose in life that rose high above the petty, miserable, lying subterfuges of the dishonest, and we, as disciples of the Esculapian art can well afford to train our minds and attune our souls to a true appreciation of this part of his character, in the moulding of our own and in our dealings with our fellowmen. The young practitioner contending with "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" may "take up arms against (his) sea of troubles" in disgruntled fashion, but he had far better study the life of this plain man of the people and extract from the rich placer of his life, the glistening nuggets of his wonderful example.

Let a man take a position, right or wrong, that is opposed to the concensus of opinion of those associated with or about him, in private, business, political or professional life and one of two things will happen: retirement to the shades of the unknown and the unheard of, or a fierce and persistent personal attack. The principle will be forgotten. If in this life one wishes to lessen friction, satisfy the multitude, avoid trouble and "rough

sledding" he should bear in mind the profound and worldly wise dictum of Balzac, that, the wildest politician is he who, swimming in the river of events, keeps his head above the surface and floating with the current appears to guide its course. In sum and substance to have no principles, no guiding star. Alas, this is too often true in medicine. There are indeed too few who, like Lincoln, raise their voice for truth and honesty, accept the personal penalty, the verbal or professional crucifixion that seems to follow from such deeds even though the outgrowth of the purest of motives. To read and ponder the many rebuffs, the many defeats, Lincoln sustained for what *he* believed to be the right, makes one feel that here we have an example of the value upon others of high purposes for indeed, the defending of principles to the bitter end and to the hour of defeat, requires blood and brawn like unto our martyrs. Strong indeed is he who suffers thus, who so controls himself and his destiny that, Phoenix-like, he rises above the ashes of his defeat, uncompromising, and displaying no mean, no petty, no personal resentments. If we remain calm, if we be courageous, we may in like manner follow in the footsteps of this matchless leader. If you have tasted the bitter dregs of the cup of defeat, have felt the keen edge of soul-suffering it entails, have felt that never again could you breast the surging wave within the whirlpool of life, then take down those volumes wherein is recorded the

early, middle and late life and sufferings of Abraham Lincoln. To him, failure seemed to be but the crucible in which he was melted; each failure like each heating of the crucible seemed to remove again and again the slag and dross from his character, until purged and purified by many heatings he was like unto a pure and tenuous metal capable of infinite and intricate moulding.

In these halcyon days when the damage-suit lawyer seeks to make litigation, when the unsuspecting physician presents an "easy mark" it were well to bear in mind his immortal words upon this subject. "Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often the real loser, in fees, expense and waste of time. Never stir up litigation. A worse man can scarcely be found than one who does this. A moral tone ought to be infused into the profession, which should drive such men out of it." Though his appearance was against him he was unusually successful as a lawyer, without in any wise breaking his own rule. Hill says of him: "During all his three and twenty years of active practice Lincoln never found it necessary to sacrifice his conscience to a code; he never surrendered his private principles for gain; his services were constantly in demand but they were never for sale; he served hundreds of clients, but was owned by none. His ideas of justice and

honor were not regulated by the latest decision; he recognized something higher than the judgment of a court of last resort. Yet he was neither an impractical dreamer nor a God." Here, my medical brethren we have epitomized a code of ethics worthy of any man.

He did not miss suffering. Malignity welled from its deepest and darkest pits to villify him; no accusation was too low or too mean but what was hurled against him; insult upon insult was heaped upon him mountain high, Ossa on Pelia; personal malice and spite were vented upon him as rank and poisonous as the deadly cobra, until Honor blushed and Truth hid its head to think that he must suffer so. But he remained unmoved. Like some tall mountain of granite upon whose serried sides the wintry storms have beat until the polished rock shines and glistens, so he stood amid the storms of hatred and passion, undaunted, untouched, unflinching. Vengeance is mine saith the Lord of Hosts; this Lincoln remembered, and all through the hatred, pettinesses and even treachery of those around him, he went his way rugged, strong, unswerving. He sought no vengeance but forgave; practiced patience and fortitude at all times, and ever listened to the dictates of a heart that beat synchronously and sympathetically with all human suffering. Slow, honest, temperate in body, thought, word and deed, he bore without complaint the sorrows of a Nation,

ever teaching us by personal precept and action. We appreciate Lincoln's heroic qualities as a great President, as the Saviour and Preserver of a now United Nation, as a martyr, but we love and revere his memory because he was at all times Lincoln, *the man*, a human, sentient being like ourselves. We love him because his life, character and achievements are possible to any man, in any line of occupation. for in all lines the elements of success are built upon the fundamental principles upon which he conducted his life.

This lank, loose limbed man never knew, never sought, never wanted rest. Melancholy brooded over him from birth to a piteous death closed by tragedy. But when the recording Angels trace with blazing stilus upon the golden tablets of Immortality the records of deeds well done, how small, how cold, will seem those of military conquerors beside this humble, lowly, simple, plain, poverty stricken and clumsy backwoodsman, who left a memory so noble, so high, so holy that *all* men, of every political creed, revere and cherish it, claiming it as a birth-right and so deep has it been engraven into the public conscience, and so majestic have grown its true proportions that it has become a basic part of our American Institutions. To-day his memory rises like the sun to illuminate and strengthen men's lives, to shed a radiance of holy sympathy over their deeds, and to warm the hearts of his fellow creatures.

God seemingly took from the sterile clay of this uninviting farm enough to make a mould wherein He created a man, the like of whom has rarely been equalled, destined him to suffer and bear the pangs of sorrow and humiliation and as did His only begotten Son, die an ignominious death.

Only by standing at this humble spot, only by contemplation of his still humbler home can we realize how the light of his life was shed, how it spread and grew until the whole Nation was basked in its effulgence.

Only by standing here and realizing that he was the friend of the Nation do we understand and appreciate how cruel and foul was the assassin shot that struck him down, yet in that tragic passing men saw his life illumined in its true radiance, and awoke to a full realization of the truth of Stanton's words "He belongs to the immortals."

" 'Tis the wink of an eye, 'tis the draught
of a breath;
From the blossom of health to the paleness
of death,
From the guilded saloon, to the bier and
the shroud,
Oh, why should the spirit of Mortal be
proud?"
